

SOUTH COUNTY STATUS PAPER

Summary:

After meetings with stakeholders which included the South County Plan Steering Committee, property owners, the WA State Department of Commerce and Department of Fish & Wildlife three changes to the plan were made. These resulting changes include: 1) establishing Urban Reserve (UR) zones in lieu of Economic Urban Growth Areas, 2) a revision to the Urban Reserve (UR) area north of Toledo, and 3) eliminating the urban reserve areas at the I-5/Toledo-Vader Road Area, due to location and lack of any development. These changes will be discussed further below. It is anticipated that the Planning Commission will take up this proposal again with a public hearing in November with their recommendation going to the Board of County Commissioners for consideration in this year's Annual GMA Amendment process.

Introduction:

In 2008, a partnership of interests started planning for the future of South Lewis County under the direction of Lewis County and representatives of the cities (Vader, Toledo, and Winlock), area business and property owners, the Economic Development Council, the South County Chamber of Commerce, and the Cowlitz Tribe. An advisory committee was formed to oversee and guide this process. The Advisory Committee, the consultants, and experts from the state departments of Ecology and Fish and Wildlife studied the subarea looking for locations along I-5 and the state highways that were largely undeveloped and free of environmental constraints. The state agencies provided information on areas within the subarea that should be protected from development due to water supply and quality features and priority wildlife habitats. Areas zoned as Agricultural Resource Lands of Long Term Commercial Significance (ARL) were avoided.

Based on detailed studies two areas were identified as suitable for economic development in south Lewis County. These areas met the criteria described above. The first location is located on a state highway close to I-5 and connected to US 12 by the Jackson Highway. It is flat, well above the flood plain, has limited critical areas or prime habitats, and most of the existing parcels are large. The City of Toledo is close by, and could be a provider of utilities, unless or until a regional utility is founded. The second area is the location of the I-5 and 505 interchange. It was selected due to its proximity to the City of Winlock's Urban Growth Area, and the interchange containing a state highway (505).

In September of 2010, the draft South County Sub Area Plan was presented to the Planning Commission for a public hearing. After deliberations, the Planning Commission elected not to forward the plan to the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC).

Discussion of Changes:

As a result of feedback from citizens and elected leaders at a public hearing in the fall of 2010, and additional meetings among staff in 2011, several issues with the proposal were identified. Additional meetings with State departments confirmed the need to address additional issues.

In early 2011, staff held several meetings with citizens in the 505/Jackson Highway area owning property in the proposed boundary areas that had voiced concerns with the south county sub area concept.

With the concurrence of the Board of County Commissioners, the properties of owners not wanting to be designated within the proposed urban growth area were excluded. These properties were located on the east and south side of the proposed UGA and were typically smaller in size. Three parcels in a single ownership on the northwest were added to the proposed UGA to supply a comparable total acreage.

Representative of the state identified major difficulties in meeting the required level of detail for the formal designation of a new urban growth area at this time. As a result of this meeting, it was determined that the Capital Facilities element of the plan required more up to date specific information to implement an Economic Development Urban Growth Area. This would include levels of service in the area, cost estimates for construction, provider of services, sources of funding, and other elements generally found in a Capital Facilities element. The recommended solution is to designate both of the proposed UGAs as Urban Reserve. The County's intent remains to proceed with UGA designations when a suitable way has been identified to provide the required urban services, particularly water and sewer.

Urban Reserve Overlay zones are utilized to protect land identified as suitable for economic development from premature land division that preclude the transition to economic development in the future. The established underlying zoning categories remain, along with the existing uses in the development code. The establishment of Urban Reserve zones will help ensure that the preferred committee alternatives for the Economic Development Urban Growth Areas will be available for future designation as UGAs.

The County, with the Cities of Toledo, Winlock, and Vadar have been working on a co-operative utility agreement, and provisions for wastewater and water delivery service. This process is still on-going. The formation of an Economic Urban Growth Area will require delivery of services, and will be dependent on the outcome of these discussions and resulting action.

Additionally, the proposed areas to the south of the I-5/505 interchange, which are adjacent to I-5 and designated as Urban Reserve, are also being recommended to be excluded as proposed Urban Reserve. After review, several difficulties in justifying this area as a future Economic Urban Growth Area became apparent. The lack of existing development and the proposed area's remote location, and lack of adjacency to an existing Urban Growth Area or existing commercial area were identified as general deficiencies.

Next Steps:

The staff recommendation is that the County proceeds to make these changes and designate a total of two areas of Urban Reserve.

The south county plan with Urban Reserve Overlays will be presented to the Planning Commission in November 2011. It is anticipated that the Planning Commission will make their recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners. The Board will consider the recommendations as part of the County's annual GMA update in December 2011.